

Ariel Demoret

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Dear Tim O'Brien,

My father fought in the Vietnam War. I have never been able to work up the courage to ask him what it was like over there, and I don't think I will ever be able to work up that courage. However, after reading The Things They Carried, I have a little bit better idea of what the war was like.

My first memory of knowing that my father fought in a war was in the fourth grade. Our fourth grade class hosted a Veterans Day program, and if we had relatives who had been involved in any wars then they were invited to attend. As a fourth grader, I didn't quite grasp the concept of war. I had no idea of all of the hurt, memories, and experiences a war would leave with someone.

Our guests were allowed to share stories from their experiences, and one of my friends' grandfathers was describing where he was when he fought. My teacher came up and tapped my on my shoulder and whispered, "Come with me, Ariel." Confused, I complied with her wish, and followed her into the foyer of our gym.

This was the first time I had ever seen my father cry. The first, and the last. I climbed easily into his lap, and looked up into his watering eyes. I was at a loss for words. I still saw him as my strong father whom nothing could faze. I would have never imagined I would see him crying like this. I wondered what happened those long years ago to make him react like this, but I didn't dare ask.

Reading through the experiences that the men had in *The Things They Carried* gave me a general idea of what my father may have experienced in his time at war. I know that not everything in the book is going to be something that my father went through, but it might be similar in some small way.

I connected really strongly to the chapter "Field Trip", and when you discussed how Kathleen asked her father had ever killed a man. I have never had the thought that my father killed a man, because I'm not sure if he was in the actual combat zones, but just the genuine curiosity of the daughter struck a chord with me. I felt like I could really relate with her just about being curious about her fathers past experiences with war.

We read this book in class, as a summer reading book, and I am really glad that we read it. It is a book that I would have never picked up, because I am not the type that normally reads books about war. However, reading this book really gave me an insight of what the war was like, at least for some people, and maybe even some of the things my own father saw. In a way, it answers all of the questions I had always wanted to ask.

Sincerely,
Ariel Demoret